

**THE BENEFITS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT OF
PROSPECTIVE FIREFIGHTERS IN THE HIGH POINT FIRE DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The hiring process for prospective firefighters in the High Point Fire Department has mainly focused on the strength and fitness condition of the individuals. Physical agility tests, a short interview and a polygraph test have been the basic elements used to hire new recruits.

Firefighters are required to perform at levels requiring maximum strength, but the department has fallen short when it came to assessing the psychological traits of prospective firefighters.

The problem leading to this research project was the High Point Fire Department does not administer psychological testing for prospective firefighters, thus leaving the department with no knowledge of the mental stability of these individuals.

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate and research the benefits of psychological testing for prospective firefighters, so High Point Fire Department has knowledge of their mental stability. Evaluative research was used to answer the following questions

1. What are the legal issues in administering psychological tests for public employees?
2. Which psychological tests are the most reliable for the High Point Fire Department?
3. How accurate is psychological testing in the prediction of future behavior of firefighters at High Point Fire Department?
4. How does the leadership of High Point Fire Department feel psychological testing for prospective firefighters will aid the department?

The procedures used to complete this research project included information gathered at the Learning Resource Center, reading psychology books and consultation with an expert in the field of psychological testing.

The results of this project indicated that it is imperative to know the personality traits and behaviors of the firefighters at the High Point Fire Department.

Recommendations included using a series of psychological tests as another tool for the assessment in the hiring process of new firefighters.

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INTRODUCTION

The High Point Fire Department is a career department that provides coverage for a progressive and growing city known as the Furniture Capital of the world. The department presently has 14 stations with over 200 firefighters that provide coverage for 90,000 citizens.

In the past five years, the city has experienced a large amount of growth due to annexation and expansion of business and industrial developments in the northern area of the city. During the past three years, the department has hired 64 firefighters and built two new fire stations to maintain adequate coverage to the new areas.

Due to normal attrition and the staffing of two new stations, the department had a hiring process with each recruit class consisting of at least 21 prospective firefighters. The new recruits had to pass a physical abilities test, go through two interviews, pass a polygraph test, and a medical evaluation to be hired. The department has always placed physical fitness as the main component for hiring the candidate and seldom looked at the mental fitness of the candidate. If the candidate was strong, it was believed they were right for the job. There have been no tests to evaluate the psychological aspects of the candidate to see how they may operate under stress or in an emergency situation. Not until the past three years has the department required anything other than a short oral interview and passing a physical abilities test. If the candidate passed the physical abilities test and interviewed well, they were believed to be the perfect candidate. It has become apparent to the administration staff that a more in depth look into the candidate's mental fitness is essential in hiring the best suited candidate.

The problem leading to this research paper was the High Point Fire Department does not administer psychological testing for prospective firefighters, thus leaving the department with no knowledge of the mental stability of these individuals.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and research the benefits of psychological testing for prospective firefighters, so High Point Fire Department has knowledge of their mental stability.

An evaluative research method, including an interview with an expert in the field of psychological testing, interviews with departments who use psychological tests, interviews with top administrators in the High Point Fire Department, reading fire service publications and psychology books were used to answer the following questions

1. What are the legal issues in administering psychological tests for public employees?
2. Which psychological tests are the most reliable for the High Point Fire Department?
3. How accurate is psychological testing in the prediction of future behavior of firefighters at High Point Fire Department?
4. How does the leadership of High Point Fire Department feel psychological testing for prospective firefighters will aid the department?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The High Point Fire Department is a progressive department that provides coverage for a growing and expanding city. The services offered by the department include first responder, water rescue, hazardous materials, advanced rescue, fire prevention and fire suppression. During the past five years the city has increased by 20 square miles and the population has grown to 90,000 putting the department in a position of being unable to provide service to the citizens in the capacity they were accustomed. A proposal was presented to the city manager and council members requesting additional firefighters to continue the quality of service the city deserves. The request was granted and the department has had two recruit classes with a third starting in

March 2003. These new recruits were hired by meeting standards set forth in the Candidate Physical Abilities Test (CPAT), an interview with a panel of three Chief Officers from High Point Fire Department, a polygraph test and a medical exam. The CPAT test proved to be a positive step in eliminating the less physically fit candidate from the process. That obviously does not mean they are the perfect all around candidate for the position. The department has improved the interview process by having more than one interview with the candidates. A panel of Chief Officers selected a pool of candidates who advanced to a final interview with the Fire Chief. There has been some improvement in the selection process through conducting two interviews because it enabled the staff to have a little more insight into the candidates' personality traits by seeing them on two different occasions. This still does not give the psychological profile needed which will indicate job behavior of new candidates.

During the past three years, the department has invested thousands of dollars in training new recruits to become firefighters. The recruits graduate from training, get assigned to a station and then begin having problems with taking orders, not fitting in with other firefighters, becoming rebellious and various other problems. The department has lost 22 firefighters during the past three years due to the fact that they are unable to adapt to the profession or disobeying rules. Those departures included 10 dismissals due to personal conduct and 12 leaving to pursue a career in another profession. The disturbing fact concerning these departures is that 13 were hired during the past 3 years (A.B. Cummings personal communication, March 2003). These numbers alone indicate the need for a more in depth look into the psychological profile of prospective firefighters for the High Point Fire Department. If the department continues to lose firefighters at the present rate, it will always operate short staffed and have many inexperienced firefighters on the apparatus.

This research project was completed to meet the requirements of Executive Leadership for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. This course was designed to help students understand their own personalities and leadership styles through a series of psychological assessments. This project was researched and recommended that psychological testing be added as another venue in the pre employment process for the High Point Fire Department.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Need for Psychological Testing

There are many reasons to incorporate psychological testing into the hiring process for the position of firefighter. Canavan (1981) states, "The US Department of Labor has officially designated firefighting as "the most dangerous profession in the country." Firefighting is a job that makes physical, mental, and spiritual demands of those who choose to enter the field" (p.136). Also in the article Canavan (1981) states, "McLaughlin feels that today's firefighters are subjected to more pressure, because of less manpower. "More is expected of firefighters today," McLaughlin said, "so they have to live up to a higher standard" (p.128).

Firefighters are required to wear many different hats in the modern day fire service. The days of providing only fire protection is a thing of the past. Firefighters render services that include emergency medical, hazardous materials, advanced rescue, dive rescue, fire prevention and public education. These services are provided with the same number of firefighters that originally just fought fires. This adds stress to the firefighters by the amount of training that is required to meet these demands and the increase in call volume.

An article by Clark (2000) states the following:

A master's degree from Harvard might look great on a resume, but experts agree if the holder lacks motivation and integrity – well, it's just a piece of paper. In today's job market, managers responsible for hiring new employees are taking a much closer look at candidates, and research indicates while education and skills are important, individuals' personality traits just might be their strongest suit (p.26).

According to the Human Investment Consulting Firm, "From a cost-effectiveness standpoint, the rule is hire for core motivation and trait characteristics, and develop knowledge and skills. The negative impact of a bad hire goes beyond the simple aggravation of going through the interviewing process over again. Consider also turnover costs related to reduced productivity. Consider morale issues involving an unhappy employee prior to resignation or termination, and finally, think about re-training the replacement. The possibility of litigation is a consideration as well" (p.26).

The cost for training firefighters is expensive and cannot be done in a short period of time. There are state and local requirements that must be met, which can take up to three months to obtain, and the minimum number of recruits required to have a class in the High Point Fire Department is eight.

Podell (1988) states, "High stress occupations lead to physical and mental problems. Public safety employees have high rates of depression, domestic problems, substance abuse, and suicide" (p.68). That alone indicates the importance of assessing as much information as possible before hiring the candidate.

In a lawsuit in Jersey City the Judge upheld the right for the city to use psychological tests for hiring purposes.

An article by Canavan (1981) states the following:

“While a psychological evaluation intrudes on an applicant’s privacy,” the Judge ruled, “it may save him from the risk of losing his life. Further, “Coolahan said “The psychological evaluation is useful and effective in identifying applicants whose emotional makeup makes them high-risk candidates for the job of firefighting” (p.136).

Traits of the Candidates

An article by Bob (1998) denotes the following:

Fire administrators need to control the process by knowing which target they are trying to hit. They must determine the traits they are looking for and set those guidelines for the psychological tests. Some obvious traits would be the ability to operate in a living environment, to resolve conflict, to follow instruction, and to function during emergencies. Also, if problems of discipline or any other current problems are occurring within the department, those areas of concern should be addressed in the psychological tests” (p.136).

Smelson (1979) states, “Firefighters must be able to follow orders immediately, think clearly, and act quickly under the strain of hard physical labor and great personal danger” (p.22).

In a telephone interview with Norma DiLorenzo, a psychologist with Martin-McAllister Consulting Psychologists she stated the following are the key qualities they look for in firefighter personnel (personal communication, April 2003):

Ability to manage stress

Impulse control

Assertiveness

Courage

Professional image and interpersonal style

Solid problem-solving skills and good judgment

Ability to make immediate decisions and to maintain composure in a crisis

Ability to form relationships with fellow firefighters and members of the community

Willingness and ability to back up fellow firefighters

Honesty and integrity

Loyalty, dedication, and commitment to the job and to the community

Ability to derive satisfaction from serving the community

Willingness to follow direction and to adhere to the organizational chain of command

Consistency and reliability of performance, conscientiousness, and responsibility

Openness to learning and acceptance of suggestions and constructive criticism

Willingness to earn one's stripes

Ability to communicate quickly and effectively with others

Ability to control anger

Ability to demonstrate compassion to members of the community

Ability to know when to take the lead and when to step back

Willingness to ask questions if unsure

Podell (1988) states the following:

PS can assist you in selecting individuals who are more likely to remain and become strong team members. The environmental conditions necessary to public-safety employment, such as rotating and long shifts, mandatory overtime, and dealing with death and traumatic crisis, all contribute to the need for personal integrity and stability" (p.68)

Types of Psychological Tests

There are many different opinions in selecting the most reliable tests relating to fire service and public safety professions.

An article by Clark (2000) states the following:

Profile Evaluations, Inc. (PEI), which is geared specifically to public safety agencies, offers a job-related test battery that assesses job candidates' personality compatibility with personal characteristic requirements of the position. The test also gauges job candidates' ability to do more than one thing at a time and remain focused under stress ("distraction testing") and their learning and problem-solving abilities (p.26).

Martin-McAllister Consulting Psychologists use a battery of tests for pre-employment evaluations which include the following:

A comprehensive interview that is primarily focused on work and career-related issues. They explore areas such as family history, education, interest in the pursuit of fire service, the individual's strengths and developmental needs, mental health history, legal history, exploration of the use of mood altering drugs and chemicals, and overall judgement.

The paper and pencil psychological tests include verbal comprehension, numerical reasoning, and verbal reasoning sub-tests of the Employee Aptitude Survey series; the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-II; the California Psychological Inventory; the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator; and writing sample.

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test has been used for many years in the screening process for firefighters. Smelson (1979) stated, that he used the MMPI in the screening process of 30 candidates who applied for firefighter positions in New Jersey from May 1977 through October 1978 (p.22). Johnson (1983) also notes, "the MMPI is the most

frequently employed nonprojective test. The sentence completion was the most frequently used projective test for firefighters (p.432).

The author visited Charlotte Fire Department in Charlotte, North Carolina and spoke with Austin Hardison, Administrative Officer, about a criterion-related validity report they had participated in during the past year for The Work Styles Inventory (WSI) Test available for prospective firefighters. A complete job analysis of an entry level firefighter was sent to the testing company, Firefighter Selection, in advance to insure comprehensiveness and accuracy. The duties of the job identified nine important categories which include: effective teamwork while co-habiting; thoroughness and attention to detail; commitment and devotion; receives and responds to orders or instructions; fire suppression, rescue, and forcible entry; EMS duties; inspection duties; station and apparatus/equipment maintenance that do involve others; and station and apparatus/equipment maintenance duties that do not involve others (personal communication, May 2003).

In a telephone interview with Clarence Hunter, Assistant Chief in Training, with the Greensboro Fire Department in Greensboro North Carolina he said they have been using psychological testing since 1989. Assistant Chief Hunter believes that psychological testing is a vital component in their pre-employment process and he would be afraid to hire someone without using it. He noted that the results of the evaluations and the recommendations from the psychological company have been very accurate. There have been less than five candidates misread since the process began. The tests they use are the Wonder Lic, which is a personality test to determine the mental profile of the candidate; Brief Intelligence Test, to determine the mental ability of the candidate; and the California Personality Inventory (CPI), which test general personality (personal communication June 2003).

Legal Issues

The High Point Fire Department is not an entity of civil service or the union. The department operates under the same rules that are set forth for all departments in the city. The author contacted Susan Swaim, Benefits Liaison for the City of High Point, and she stated there were no legalities that prohibit the High Point Fire Department from including psychological testing as another criteria in the hiring process. She also concluded the High Point Police Department had been using psychological testing for several years in their pre-employment process (personal communication, March 2003).

In a study assessing pre-employment tests for law enforcement officers Schofield (1993) eludes:

“Psychological testing for law enforcement positions is not legally required as a matter of Federal law. However, this type of testing is generally a lawful option for police administrators if the psychological evaluation is job-related and results are not disclosed in a manner that violates legitimate privacy interests. The decision of whether and how to use psychological testing should be based on the correlation of such tests to job performance. For example, the Supreme Court of New Jersey in the case of *Matter of Vey* cautioned that while the use of psychological tests to predict or evaluate employee job performance is a recognized part of the American workplace, such tests... “are only as good as their correlation to actual job performance.” The court, relying on State civil service law ruled that the law enforcement agency had the burden of establishing the job validity of its psychological tests by producing “...evidence of a correlation between such nonpathological test results and actual job performance” (p.28).

Schofield (1993) also notes it may be necessary to delay psychological testing of applicants until at least a conditional offer of employment is made because of ADA requirements (p.30).

Administrative Prospective

The author asked three Chief Officers to write their opinions on the benefits of psychological testing for pre employment of future firefighters. The following are the responses received from the participants:

David Taylor, Chief of the department, feels that psychological testing would be good for the department. Like most progressive and growing fire departments, the High Point Fire Department has an active recruitment program to attract and retain qualified applicants. While our recruitment program is considered by many to be comprehensive, I think that psychological testing is vital and a missing link. We do an excellent job of contacting a diverse population; determining who is physically able to do the job; determining who has a genuine interest in being and the intellectual ability to be a firefighter and selecting only those applicants who have demonstrated strong moral standards and who has made some good decisions in their personal lives.

While our recruitment process is thorough we are still concerned about our recruit firefighters and how they might react to a number of situations they might face in the future. I think psychological testing might help determine:

- How they might adjust to life in the fire station
- How they might react to having to work 24 hour shifts
- How they react to life and death situations

- How they react to stressful situations
- How they perform under paramilitary conditions

It is difficult to determine emotional stability of the job applicant through the normal interview process. It takes a professional psychological evaluation to figure out if an applicant is suited to meet the demands of being a professional firefighter. This type of testing can be expensive on the front-end but well worth it when you consider that you have all that is possible to select those applicants who have a reasonable chance to be successful (personal communication, March 2003).

Keith Price, Deputy Chief of Operations, feels psychological testing could very well aid the department in the hiring process. He states there is the obvious benefit of identifying an employee that may have a deep seated problem that could lead to violence, unsafe work practices, or other undesirable actions. A secondary benefit could be some sort of personality typing coming from the testing. Although firefighting appears on the surface to be an action packed career, there is a lot of “down time” that may be spent in close contact with others stationed with you. It is important that newly hired personnel “fit in” to the environment of station (firehouse) life (personal communication, March 2003).

Rick Fritz, Battalion Chief of Training, states psychological testing for new candidates is a must in today’s fire service. We no longer have a “blue collar, military veteran” pool of people from which we can draw. Society has changed to the point where the fire service is having a difficult time finding suitable people to fit into the fire department “life style” of working 24 hour shifts, living closely with others and working together as a team. Modern society has evolved into a “me” or individualistic form and most current applicants are not ready nor have

they ever been exposed to working and living conditions that are experienced daily in the fire service.

High Point Fire Department can only benefit from early psychological testing. These tests are an early screening and allow the department to weed out applicants who are not suitable for the lifestyle of a firefighter. The early use of this tool saves the department time and money and ensures that they select candidates that will be easier to retain over a long career rather than someone who decides to leave after two or three months because they are unable to handle the life of a firefighter (personal communication, March 2003).

Literature Review Summary

The literature review provided insight concerning the importance of psychological testing. The research indicated that the mental fitness of an individual is as important as the physical fitness. In the modern day fire service, firefighters are exposed to more than just fires as they have been in the past. It is important to find out as much as possible about a prospective firefighter before investing time and money. Podell (1988) states that public safety employees have a high rate of mental problems due to the profound stress of the job (p.68). Clark (2000) states that managers responsible for hiring should look at the candidates' personality traits as the strongest suit instead of education (p.26). The cost of training a firefighter and the time involved is much longer than in the average profession. The High Point Fire Department has invested several months and several thousand dollars in the candidate before they can benefit the department. Clark (2000) states it is cost-effective to hire for core motivation and trait characteristics because a bad hire affects morale issues, reduced productivity, and leads to re-training of new firefighters (p.26).

The traits and personalities of firefighters are extremely important to be successful in the profession. Smelson (1979) states, "Firefighters must be able to follow orders immediately, think clearly, and act quickly under the strain of hard physical labor and great personal danger" (p.22). Podell (1988) states that for individuals to become strong team members they must be able to adapt to long rotating shifts, overtime, and dealing with death and trauma (p.68).

There are several different tests that can be used to measure personality traits and mental stability. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory has been used for many years in public safety as a measuring device. Johnson (1983) notes, "the MMPI is the most frequently employed nonprojective test" (p.432). The most important aspect about the testing process is the test must be reliable and validated. Charlotte Fire Department followed that process by sending the testing company, Firefighter Selections, the responsibilities and job performance requirements of a firefighter and then validating the test by using seasoned department officers. Clark (2000) states the test should assess the candidates' personality compatibility with personal characteristics required for the position (p.26). Martin-McAllister Consulting Psychologists also perform a comprehensive interview which explores areas such as education, legal history, family history, mental health history, exploration of mood altering drugs and chemicals, and overall judgement. Greensboro Fire Department also meets the standards and requirements found in the research through testing in several different psychological aspects of the candidate. The legal aspect of psychological testing must be approached in the same manner as physical fitness testing, the test must be job related. Schofield (1993) notes that tests are only as good as their correlation to actual job performance and if you go to court the department has the burden of establishing evidence the tests meets actual job performance (p.28).

PROCEDURES

This research project employed evaluative research that led to the possibility of incorporating psychological testing into the pre-employment process. The procedures used to complete the research included a literature review of fire service magazines, police journals, books and magazines that contained information on psychological testing. Personal interviews were conducted with an expert in the field of psychological testing, Benefits liaison with the city of High Point, Administrative Officer in Recruitment with Charlotte Fire Department, Assistant Chief in Training with Greensboro Fire Department, and Chief officers at High Point Fire Department.

The literature review focused on gathering information that would indicate the importance of knowing the psychological make-up of prospective candidates for pre-employment to the High Point Fire Department.

Literature Review

The literature review began at the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy in January 2003. Materials were also gathered at the High Point Public Library in High Point, North Carolina, Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina, Criterion-Validity Report from Charlotte Fire Department, testing information and protocol for pre-employment evaluations from Martin-McAllister Consulting Psychologists in Minnesota.

Personal Interviews

A personal interview was conducted with Norma DiLorenzo, a psychologist with Martin-McAllister Consulting Psychologists in St. Paul Minnesota during the month of April 2003. Ms. DiLorenzo acknowledges that for psychological evaluations to be valid, the assessment must be job specific, department specific and have job-related characteristics. She feels their

evaluations are thorough because they focus on different aspects of the candidate. They interview the candidate and explore not only career and work related issues, but also family history, education, mental health history, legal history and overall judgement. Ms. DiLorenzo believes it is important to have knowledge of the intellectual capacity of the candidate in order to have an indication of how quickly the candidate will learn what they need to know to be successful on the job. She said the evaluations also consist of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-II, California Psychology Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The conclusions of the psychologist regarding the candidate are based on all of the information gathered from the assessment process as a whole and then they provide an overall description of the candidate in a report to the department.

Personal consultation with David Taylor, Chief of High Point Fire Department, in March 2003 about how he feels psychological testing will benefit the department. Chief Taylor feels that the department has a progressive recruiting program that attracts qualified applicants, but thinks psychological testing is a vital link that should be added to the pre-employment process. He said it is difficult to determine emotional stability of the applicant through a normal interview process. He believes that testing will aid in determining how an individual will adjust to life at the fire station, react to shift work, react to life and death situations, stressful situations, and perform in paramilitary conditions.

Personal consultation with Keith Price, Deputy Chief of Operations, at the High Point Fire Department in March 2003. Deputy Chief Price believes that psychological testing will benefit the department in identifying a candidate that could possibly have a deep seated emotional problem which could lead to violence, unsafe work practices, or other undesirable

behavior. He also believes it could identify some sort of personality typing to obtain candidates that will fit into the environment of station life.

Personal consultation with Rick Fritts, Battalion Chief of Training, at the High Point Fire Department during the month of March 2003. Battalion Chief Fritz agrees that psychological testing is a must in today's fire service. He believes that the early use of screening will save the department a lot of time and money due to selecting the right candidate for the job. He feels it is imperative to find a person that is suitable to the fire department "life style" of working closely together with others as a team and 24 hour shifts.

Personal consultation with Austin Hardison, Administrative Officer in Recruitment at the Charlotte Fire Department during the month of May. Ms. Hardison discussed their concern of selecting the candidate that would also be career minded. She said they participated in a test study operated by Firefighter Selection geared specifically for pre-entry level employment. The test was developed by the company, using Charlotte Fire Department firefighter job description and work behaviors necessary for performance as an entry-level firefighter. They validated the test and feel it will be a helpful tool to use for pre-employment testing and hiring for their department. As of this date the test has not been used.

Personal consultation with Clarence Hunter, Assistant Chief in Training with Greensboro Fire Department during the month of June 2003. Assistant Chief Hunter discussed the personality tests they have used since 1989. He feels the tests for very reliable and would be afraid to hire a candidate without results of the tests. The tests they use are the Wonder Lic, a brief intelligence test, and California Personality Inventory. The combination of the tests gives a comprehensive report of the mental stability and personality of the candidate.

Assistant Chief Hunter said they will continue psychological testing of prospective candidates.

Personal consultation with Susan Swaim, Benefits Liaison for the City of High Point during the month of March 2003. She assisted with legal issues relating to psychological testing for public safety employee.

Personal consultation with Angie Cummings, Administrative Assistant for High Point Fire Department during the month of March 2003. She assisted with providing statistics on the number of firefighters and the reason they are no longer with the department.

Limitations and Concerns

The limitations that affected this project were the lack of information relating to fire departments exercising the use of psychological testing. Police departments and emergency medical services have been exercising the use of psychological tests for many years. Most research gathered for this research project was data from police and emergency services. One concern when administering pre-employment psychological testing is to make sure the test is validated and job related for the position of firefighter. This is imperative for the department should a law suit arise. The goal of this project was to research the benefits of pre-employment psychological testing for new candidates at the High Point Fire Department.

Definitions of Terms

CPI – California Psychological Inventory – a general personality inventory designed primarily to differentiate among essentially normal individuals on a number of dimensions, including dominance, independence, responsibility, self-control.

MMP-II- a clinical screening instrument designed primarily to detect the presence of abnormal functioning and to screen out clinically significant pathology that may impair an individual's to perform the duties of a firefighter.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator- provides useful information related to work style, including how people relate to others, organizational skills, and what information is relevant to them in making decisions, i.e. facts versus feelings.

PS- Psychological Screening.

RESULTS

The research and data gathered for this project indicated that psychological testing would be a valuable tool to incorporate into the hiring process for the High Point Fire Department. Most authors agreed that it is imperative to know the traits and core values of the candidate before investing a lot of time and money in training them and have them leave shortly after going on shift. The information also indicated that interviews alone are not enough to select a candidate suited for the firefighter profession. A short interview can not detect whether a candidate will be able to take orders, deal with death and trauma, deal with stress, and live in close quarters with other firefighters.

In examining the types of tests and evaluations performed, most authors agree there are several different tests that can measure personality traits and mental stability. The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-II, the California Psychological Inventory, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are the most common tests used for evaluating prospective firefighters. The MMPI-II has been used for many years in testing public safety personnel and is still the most widely used today.

Results gathered from literature and publications stressed that it is very important to administer a test that is job specific, job related, and validated by the department. The legal aspects of psychological test should be approached in the same manner as physical fitness test. If the test does not meet the criterion, the test will not be beneficial to the department or stand up in court if that should occur.

Personal Consultation

An interview via telephone was conducted with Norma DiLorenzo, a psychologist with Martin-McAllister Consulting Psychologists in St. Paul Minnesota. She indicated that in order to have a valid evaluation, the assessment must be job related and job specific to the department. She suggested for the test to be thorough and beneficial, the assessment must cover many different areas such as intellectual tests, extensive interview with the candidate covering many issues and MMPI-II, CPI, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. She suggested the combination of these tests give a good profile of the mental stability of the candidate.

An interview was also conducted with Austin Hardison, Administrative Officer in Recruitment at the Charlotte Fire Department. The author contacted Ms. Hardison in reference to psychological testing at their department. Ms. Hardison initiated a testing group to do a validation of pre-entry tests using Charlotte Fire Department. She said they sent the company their firefighter job description and responsibilities. The company developed the test specifically for their department and they had department personnel to validate the test. Ms. Hardison was pleased with the results and stated it will benefit the department for hiring new candidates.

A personal interview was conducted with Susan Swaim, Benefits Liaison with the City of High Point, with regards to the legal aspects of psychological testing. She indicated the High Point Police Department has been using psychological tests for many years in the pre-employment

process for police officers. No laws or rules in High Point prohibit psychological testing of public employees.

An interview was conducted with Clarence Hunter, Assistant Chief in Training with Greensboro Fire Department. The author contacted Assistant Chief Hunter in reference to psychological testing in their department. He said they use three different testing methods, Wonder Lic personality test, a Brief Intelligence Test, and California Personality Inventory. He stated these tests have been very reliable and he would not hire a candidate without knowing the results of the tests.

Research Questions

1. What are the legal issues in administering psychological tests for public employees.

A review of literature indicates there are no legal issues with administering psychological tests providing the tests are job specific and job related. The legalities occur just as with physical fitness test when the test has nothing to do with the specific job or position. The other important issue is the applicant cannot be tested until a conditional job offer by been made because of ADA requirements.

2. Which psychological tests are the most reliable for the High Point Fire Department?

A review of the literature and authors indicate that the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-II is the most widely used to test public safety candidates. The test has been used for many years with periodic updates to meet the needs of today's fire service. Other tests that are valid and meet the criterion of the fire service are the California Psychology Inventory and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. These tests alone cannot determine the mental stability and

personality of the candidate. Ms. Norma DiLorenzo, psychologist suggests administering intellectual tests to measure verbal comprehension, numerical reasoning, and verbal reasoning along with an extensive personal interview.

3. How accurate is psychological testing in the prediction of future behavior of firefighters at High Point Fire Department?

The research obtained during the study indicates that high-risk candidates can be identified through psychological evaluations. Exercising the use of professionals in the field of psychological testing would indicate to the administrators at the High Point Fire Department which candidate would possess the key qualities needed to become a firefighter.

4. How does the leadership of High Point Fire Department feel psychological testing for prospective firefighters will aid the department?

David Taylor, Chief of the department, believes it is a vital link that is missing in the pre-employment process. He feels that the department is progressive in the hiring process and selects the most physically fit, the candidate with strong morals, and good intellect; however, the department falls short when it comes to knowing the mental stability of the candidate. The time and money to add this component to the pre-employment process would be a benefit to the department.

Keith Price, Deputy Chief of Operations, believes psychological testing could benefit the department by identifying a candidate that may have a deep seated emotional problem which could lead to unsafe behavior at work. He also believes it could identify personality typing to obtain candidates that will fit into the environment of station life.

Rick Fritz, Battalion Chief of Training, believes that psychological testing is a must in

today's fire service in order to find the right person suitable for the fire department lifestyle. He feels it is imperative to do early screening to save the department a lot of time and money in training someone for them to leave shortly after they have been hired.

DISCUSSION

The research for this project indicated it would be beneficial to incorporate psychological testing into the pre-employment process. The literature review revealed how important it is to know as much as possible about a candidate before hiring. The High Point Fire Department could have saved a lot of time and money if psychological tests had been incorporated in the pre-employment process earlier in the history of the department. This was evident with the number of firefighters that have left the department in the last several years. Clark (2000) states, "From a cost-effectiveness standpoint, the rule is hire for core motivation and trait characteristics, and develop knowledge and skills" (p.26). Podell (1988) states psychological screening can assist in selecting candidates that have integrity and stability, will be strong team members, can handle death and traumatic crisis, overtime, and shift work (68).

The author has participated in the last three pre-employment processes and interviewed candidates that seemed to be perfect for the job. The candidates were model individuals in training, but after assignment to a station the candidates disobeyed orders, did not like shift work and called in sick if they did not want to work on a holiday or weekend. Canavan (1981) denotes Podell (1988) states that public safety employees have a high rate of depression, domestic problems, and substance abuse due to the high stress of the occupation (p.68).

The results from the research indicated a comprehensive evaluation consisting of an in depth interview, personality indicators, and intelligence testing would meet the needs of the

department. In an interview with Ms. DiLorenzo, her evaluation includes an interview that explores family history, legal history, mental health history, overall judgement, intelligence tests that covers verbal comprehensive, numerical and verbal reasoning; the MMPI- II, CPI, and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The MMPI-II has been used for many years in testing firefighter candidates. Smelson (1979) used the test in 1977 and 1978 to test 30 firefighter candidates in New Jersey (p.22). Johnson (1983), “the MMPI is the most frequently employed nonprojective test” (p.432).

Legal issues affecting the High Point Fire Department in evaluating candidates would be no different than physical fitness evaluations. The test would need to be job specific and job related. Schofield (1993) states, “such tests are only as good as their correlation to actual job performance” (p.28). The psychological test should be treated the same as the medical evaluation when it comes to administering it. Schofield (1993) notes an applicant must be given a conditional job offer before testing can be performed (p.30).

The author’s interpretation of the results indicate there is a need to incorporate psychological testing in the pre-employment process. The US Department of Labor has noted that firefighting is the most dangerous profession in the country and requires a lot from each individual in the profession. This alone indicates a need for some sort of mental stability evaluation before hiring an individual. The top administrators in the High Point Fire Department also see a need to gain more information about the mental stability of a candidate before hiring them as a firefighter.

The results of this study may have a positive impact on the future of the High Point Fire Department. The information gathered answered a lot of questions why the department

looses firefighters after a short period of employment and why others react the way they do to taking orders and working long hours.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The High Point Fire Department should incorporate psychological testing as another component in the pre-employment process in order to better understand the candidate' mental stability and personality traits. Research has indicated it is imperative to know as much as possible about the candidate due to the nature of the profession.

The High Point Fire Department should select a professional psychological company to administer the evaluations. The company should build the test to meet the job performance responsibilities and requirements of an entry level firefighter in the High Point Fire Department. The evaluations should include a comprehensive interview into the candidates' background which explores education, legal history, family history, mental health history, exploration of mood altering drugs and chemicals, and overall judgement. Research indicated the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-II is very reliable and has been used for many years in the fire service profession. The battery of tests Martin-McAllister Consulting Psychologists use also incorporates a series of aptitude tests, the California Psychological Inventory, and the Myers-Briggs Indicator. This complete series of psychological evaluations meets the needs of the High Point Fire Department in acquiring the information needed for pre-employment testing.

A conditional job offer must be given to the prospective candidate before administering a psychological test in order to meet ADA requirements. The test must also be valid and reliable to be beneficial and legal.

The research and results for this project have been reviewed by High Point Fire Chief, David Taylor. Through the research and his own beliefs Chief Taylor recognized the need to implement psychological testing in the pre-employment process. Psychological testing will be added to the pre-employment process for the next recruit class at the High Point Fire Department.

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